

Message Text

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21

ACTION EUR-25

INFO OCT-01 IO-14 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-11

L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-03 SS-20

USIA-15 AID-20 EB-12 CIEP-03 TRSE-00 STR-08 OMB-01

CEA-02 COME-00 SAM-01 DRC-01 /163 W

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R 021622Z OCT 74

FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4423

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY DUBLIN

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY ROME

USMISSION EC BRUSSELS

USMISSION NATO BRUSSELS

USMISSION OECD PARIS

AMCONSUL BELFAST

AMCONSUL EDINBURGH

AMCONSUL LIVERPOOL

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, PGOV, UK

SUBJECT: LABOR STEPS UP ATTACK

SUMMARY: COMMON MARKET MEMBERSHIP ISSUE SURFACED AGAIN
WHEN PRIME MINISTER WILSON, ANSWERING OPPOSITION CRITICS
OF LABOR PARTY'S COMMITMENT TO DECIDE QUESTION BY REFER-
ENDUM OR GENERAL ELECTION, UNVEILED OPINION POLL SHOWING
76 PERCENT OF ELECTORATE FAVORS REFERENDUM. LABOR PARTY
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ALSO ATTACKED CONSERVATIVE HOUSING PROPOSALS. IT SEEMS

EVIDENT THAT LABOR BELIEVES TORY 9-1/2 PERCENT MORTGAGE PROMISE HAS WIDE VOTER APPEAL, WHILE ITS MORE COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO HOUSING PROBLEM LACKS POLITICAL SEX APPEAL. BOTH DEVELOPMENTS, HOWEVER, ILLUSTRATE PARTIES' DIFFICULTIES IN FINDING ISSUES WHICH WILL ENLIVEN THIS RELATIVELY DULL CAMPAIGN. END SUMMARY

1. PRIME MINISTER WILSON OCTOBER 1 PULLED A SURPRISE RABBIT OUT OF HIS HAT IN THE FORM OF A MARKET AND OPINION RESEARCH POLL (COMMISSIONED BY LABOR PARTY) WHICH SHOWS 76 PERCENT OF ALL VOTERS FAVOR REFERENDUM ON QUESTION OF BRITISH MEMBERSHIP IN EEC. POLL INDICATED FOLLOWING SUPPORT FOR REFERENDUM, BY PARTY AFFILIATION: CONSERVATIVE, 62 PERCENT; LIBERAL, 76 PERC AND LABOR, 88 PERCENT.

2. OCTOBER 2 LABOR PARTY PRESS CONFERENCE FEATURED RENewed ATTACK ON CONSERVATIVE PROMISE TO PEG MORTGAGE INTEREST RATES AT 9-1/2 PERCENT BY CHRISTMAS. ENVIRONMENT SECRETARY CROSLAND AND LABOR WHIP MELLISH, WHILE STRESSING THAT LABOR TOO FAVORS PRIVATE HOME OWNERSHIP, ALLEGED THAT TORY PROPOSAL IS INEQUITABLE, SOCIALLY DIVISIVE AND WOULD TRIGGER INFLATION IN HOUSING MARKET. THEY ALSO USED FAVORITE PLOY OF CONTRASTING CONSERVATIVE PROMISES WITH THAT PARTY'S PERFORMANCE DURING LAST PERIOD IN POWER, WHICH IN HOUSING SECTOR THEY CHARACTERIZED AS ABYSMAL. CONSERVATIVE LEADER HEATH'S ADMISSION ON OCTOBER 1 TELEVISION INTERVIEW THAT TORY GOVERNMENT'S HOUSING PROGRAM HAD BEEN INADEQUATE FURTHER STRENGTHENED THEIR ARGUMENTS.

3. COMMENT: WILSON'S USE OF COMMON MARKET POLL INDICATES THAT HE HAS LOST NONE OF HIS POLITICAL CUNNING AND BRIEFLY ENLIVENED THE OTHERWISE DULL CAMPAIGN. HE SOUGHT TO COUNTER OPPOSITION CRITICS OF LABOR'S POSITION AND DIVERT ATTENTION FROM ALLEGED LABOR PARTY DISUNITY ON EEC ISSUE (LONDON'S 12598). LABOR'S RENEWED ATTACK ON HOUSING ISSUE INDICATES ITS GROWING CONCERN OVER EFFECTIVENESS OF CONSERVATIVE PROPOSAL WHICH HAS BEEN EXPRESSED PRIVATELY TO EMBOFFS BY SEVERAL PARTY OFFICIALS. IN LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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THIS REGARD, LABOR'S MORE BALANCED AND COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO HOUSING PROBLEM IS DIFFICULT FOR VOTER TO UNDERSTAND AND LACKS DRAMATIC IMPACT OF TORY PLAN. SIGNIFICANCE OF THESE DEVELOPMENTS IS LESS SUBSTANTIVE THAN ILLUSTRATIVE OF DIFFICULTY ENCOUNTERED IN STIMULATING PUBLIC INTEREST IN COMING ELECTION. LACK OF PUBLIC ARDOR HAS BEEN EVIDENT IN TRIPS BY EMBOFFS TO VARIOUS PARTS OF UK AND SUBJECT OF FREQUENT MEDIA COMMENT.

SHOULD VOTER APATHY RESULT IN LOWER ELECTION TURNOUT,
TORIES COULD WELL BENEFIT, AS LABOR TRADITIONALLY DOES
BETTER WHEN THERE IS HIGH DEGREE OF VOTER PARTICIPATION.

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Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
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